6: Cipriani E-5 (1951-1953)1961 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

312 caracases of small animals. During the droughts, marine hermit crabs, of
271 which a profusion is found in Little Andaman even far from the sea-shore,
[196] often choose to die in fresh-water pools. They are not removed from the pools.
[415] A nautilus shell is sometimes used as a drinking vessel ; failing this, the Onge
[516] lap up the water like animals, on all fours, directly from the pool. Since they are
291 very fond of dogs, man and dog drink together from the same tiny pool, often holding no more than a few pints of water. Dogs reached Great Andaman as early as 1857 ; they came to Little Andaman much later. Before that time there were no dogs in the Andamanese Archipelago. They soon became the natives' cherished and much appreciated assistants in the hunting of wild pigs. Many unhygienic habits followed the appearance of dogs in the Andamans.

271 The Onge have no idea of boiling water for the purpose of disinfection ;
[47] nevertheless their health does not appear to suffer at all as a result of the pol-
123 luted water they drink. When, in 1952, I dug a well near the left bank of Dugong Creek on the north-east coast of Little Andaman, I was compelled to fence it in so as to prevent dogs from drinking it and bathing in it.

264 Dogs lick everything that smells of food, including the cooking pots,
[291] and the pots are not washed before use after the dogs have licked them.
[136] Swarms of flies of different species and small coleoptera of a brilliant blue colour, one of them 6 mms long, follow the dogs after they have "cleaned" the pots by licking them. They line the inside of the pots with a crawling, living coat, moving restlessly around in search of food. One species of fly, which is of a brilliant, metallic green colour, has a peculiarly disagreeable smell. All the flies lay eggs while feeding, but the eggs are soon devoured by the hovering bluish coleoptera. Thus in a few hours all traces of organic matter disappear from the pots. Subsequent exposure to fire undoubtedly destroys the germs that would otherwise be certainly dangerous to human beings.

415 The Onge no longer use indigenous pottery for cooking. Its disappearance
177 is recent, as the sherds that litter Little Andaman prove to the investigator.
[323] Excavation in modern kitchen-middens leads to the same conclusion. During the last war, quantities of empty petrol drums were washed up on the Andaman shores. They were found in such numbers that the Onge have not yet used them all up : after 1952 I found several of these containers abandoned, untouched, in the jungle. The primitive inhabitants sawed each container in two cylindrical halves, thus transforming them into cooking pots. The result was that within a few years the fragile ancestral pottery of the Onge disappeared altogether. Furthermore, aluminium pots were distributed among the natives after 1952. Probably the indigenous pottery will never again reappear.

[252] Each half of a petrol drum is large enough to contain a pig, or a turtle weighing
262 150 lbs, cut into pieces. Only the flesh of these animals is consumed by the
[231] Onge ; the nourishing broth is poured out onto the ground or left in the pot to be lapped up by the dogs. The Onge believe that broth is unhealthy and avoid drinking it.

251 No matter how prodigious the catch of sardines or other fish, unobtain-
[185] able at other times of the year, no attempt is made at storing part of it in view of future shortage. The Onge are unacquainted with methods for preserv-

10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

approximate estimate of the output of the different types of timber is given below. 313 433

Annual yield — 675,000 tons,

Padauk — 7000 tons, Garjan — 28,0000 tons, White Dhup — 21,000 tons, Papita — 28,000 tons, Koko — 500 tons, White Chuglam — 7,000 tons, Black Chuglam — 2,500 tons, Pyinma — 1,500 tons, Badam — 11,000 tons, Didu — 7,000 tons and others — 14,000 tons.

Source: Chengapa, B. S.—The Andaman forests and their development; Census of India, 1951, Volume XVII, Andaman & Nicobar Islands by A. K. Ghosh.

The limitations in the exploitation of the forest resources of the Andamans are not few. The problems faced upto 1934-35 were primarily because of the inefficient methods in the extraction of timber and absence of due attention in the regeneration of the forests. Previously the exploitation was confined only to the coastal areas because of the easy accessibility, but the vast tracts of rich resources in the interior remained virtually untapped in the absence of any economic device. The construction of an experimental tramline in the Rangat valley, however, proved successful. The regeneration of the forests was also little cared for. The new plantations hardly exceeded 100 acres though the exploitation was widespread over large areas. Improvements in the line of regeneration were discernible since the year 1932 and marked improvements were brought about by the year 1936-37. According to this new device, the old crop is removed in two or more successive fellings allowing nature to do the sowing. 313 185

However, some of the limiting factors in the exploitation, transportation and marketing of the forest products are given below. 313 433

(1) The selection of the forests for exploitation is made from a very vague idea and proper surveys are hardly undertaken to realise the actual conditions in the fields which really happen to be quite different from theoretical speculations. It is found that many forests specially in the North Andaman are yet to be explored. Hence the insufficiency of knowledge regarding the forests has made the proper selections of the actual spots of exploitation an impossibility.

(2) The forest working in many regions have to be abandoned because of the seasonal water-supply.

(3) The trees in the forests do not occur in pure stands and hence random felling operations are done irrespective of the type of trees. It is estimated that the total wastage of timber in the Andaman forests is approximately 1 crore of rupees in value.

10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

161 177 evil and are allowed to work such ravages upon life and health of people whose resistance level has already gone quite low.[2] Such a loss of interest in life is common to many of the aboriginal population. The aboriginal population of the Andamans have also been victimised to it and only in one century the aborigines of the Great Andaman Group have almost been wiped out and the Jarawas, in spite of their isolation, have been undergoing considerable decay. The Onges are also suffering from stagnation and decay. There has been the addiction to some of the social poisons e.g. tobacco, alcohol, etc.

The causes of decay of the aboriginal population of the Andamans may be summed up as being the followings:

1. Diseases;

2. Murder of the aborigines by the later settlers, especially the bombardment of the Japanese in the Jarawa infested areas have resulted in a virtual decline of the tribe;

3. Little productive capacity of the aboriginal women.

The sex-ratio in the case of the Onges is quite balanced and therefore, the sex-ratio is not a factor for the decline of the aboriginal population but very little productive capacity of the aboriginal population is undoubtedly a major factor of their decline and it has already been discussed.

178 As regards the material life, however satisfied the aboriginal population may be with their poor lot, it is in most primitive form and the only materials that they have in possession are for earning their livelihood. Cultural aspect is also desiccated with a dearth of richness. No evolution has, however, been observed for deriving much more material comforts and the aborigines with their hard struggle for life hardly find any time to develop their thinking which can lead to a betterment of their cultural and material life.

THE FUTURE

185 These aboriginal population have so far shown little urge for improving their own lot and in the absence of such attempts, the chances of their betterment as well as survival is a far cry. The only means of improving their lot seems to be possible through the efforts of the Government. The attempts for bringing the aborigines in a short period within the folds of an advanced economy and society have proved futile and contrary to it, the attempts of segregating the aboriginal population, as done in the

2 Nigam, R. C.—Little known tribes of the Andaman Islands—Their problems & prospects; Vol. VIII, April, 1960, No. 2.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

twining up into the trees, and the shorter-stemmed yams, are never disturbed. The Onges merely dig down, at a respectful distance from the plant, certain of finding what they want. On no account must there be any signs of the theft for the spirit to see, so they quietly take off roots or tubers some way from the main stem and leave the rest, patting the earth down afterwards and covering the place with leaves. The guardian spirit, not, apparently, all-seeing, notices nothing, as the plant continues to flourish, improved by the root pruning. Everyone, guardian spirit and Onges alike, is happy.

This unconscious preservation may well be the result of a decree, in some remote past, by an Onge seer who realized the danger of killing off the entire plants and invented the guardian spirits as a deterrent. The Negritos still make similar use of roots and tubers; Skeet and Blagden fifty years ago referred to the Semang eating poisonous wild yams, having removed the toxic substances.[1]

It is interesting that both in the past and even today a number of peoples at a very early stage of cultural development have progressed from the gathering of the wild yams of South-East Asia to the first signs of cultivation and agriculture. It is possible that they were the first plants ever to be cultivated by primitive Man, the Negritos with their digging sticks delving then as they do now; the genus is certainly a very ancient one, and some species, such as *Dioscorea alata*, may have spread from Asia to Africa and Oceania, and even to America, with the beginning of cultivation. But this is a stage of development which the peoples of the Andaman never reached.

The digging stick, the only implement the Onges have with which to get at the roots and tubers, has in recent times been affected, though to a very limited extent by the spread of iron. Only a few individuals possess a primitive iron tool, half a metre long, cylindrical in shape and usually not more than one and a half centimetres in diameter and flattened into a form of blade at one end. The vast majority still have only the age-old stick made of hard wood, hardly recognizable as a tool and crudely fashioned into a point at one end. This tool, so primitive that it can easily be mistaken for an odd

[1] It is interesting that the American Aborigines, especially in Brazil, do the same with manioc, but I saw nothing of this nature in the Andamans.

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This tool, so primitive that it can easily be mistaken for an odd piece of wood, has definite uses, and none of the nomadic forest peoples anywhere in the world are without it. Everywhere it is found it is effective in filling huge baskets with food – baskets equally simply and equally quickly made. I have already described (see p. 93) the baskets made by the Onges for purely temporary use on their hunting expeditions. In the communal huts, however, the making of real baskets involves hours of careful plaiting, working the supple fibres from the strong bark of selected rushes, and expert finishing. These baskets are an invariable and prized part of every family's inheritance and are preserved for as long as possible. Nowhere in the collection of basketry from Great Andaman are there baskets with more craftsmanship than the permanent ones of the Onges.[1] All the baskets are the shape of half an egg. There is little variation in size, all being about forty centimetres in diameter at the top, and about forty-five centimetres deep, unlike the temporary carriers, which vary considerably in size, according to whether they are to be carried by men, women, or even children, and what is to be carried.

At the opposite extreme from the underground harvest of roots, men and women alike use long thin hooked poles to hook down fruit from the trees, climbing up into the trees when necessary to strip the highest branches and then hiding the poles in the forest until they are next required (no attempt is ever made to carry them about). When the tree is not too large, it is ruthlessly chopped down and stripped as it lies on the ground. I was horrified in the first fortnight of April to see this happen to trees which the Onges call *dangbecciò*, which bear blackish-red fruit about the size of a pigeon's egg. The attraction is the flavour of the pulp, but there is little of it, surrounding a large nut. To get at the pulp a thick, hard case has to be cracked, but to the formidable Onge teeth this is no problem and the case cracks comparatively easily. The nut itself is not edible; the honey-coloured pulp is sweetish, but there is so little that it takes ten fruits to provide ten grams of it. The fruits hang in bunches at the end of branches covered with leaves rather like a chestnut. As the wood is very soft, the Onges usually hack the trees down; large ones may merely have their branches lopped

[1] Editor's note: The author indicated in manuscript at this point his intention of giving a full description of the way in which these are made, but unfortunately died before he was able to do so.

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222 off, so that they may eventually recover, although they may take several years to do so.

The fruit they gather most, however, is the *bulundanghe*, a wild form of the so-called jack-fruit. This ripens a little later than the *dangheccio* at the end of April, and is the occasion of intense activity. Men, women and children swarm to the harvest, returning to the camp loaded every night. When fully ripe the *bulundanghe* fall open if rubbed between the fingers. I found the pulp very pleasant, but the seeds need the Onge stomach to cope with them. They would [185] in fact be suitable for storage over long periods as they do not seem to deteriorate, but the Onges would never think of this.

At no other time of year did I see so many baskets lying round the Onge camps, cast aside after use. As early as mid-March, impatient for the fruit, bitter but already fully grown to the size of a child's head, the Onges begin to strip the trees. When fully ripe the fruit are a yellowish-green, with a very wrinkled outer case, marked off as it were into tiny compartments, geometrical in shape, and mostly pentagonal. If one presses a finger on one of these it goes through into the fruit, which has the appearance of innumerable tiny cells, all separated by a membrane, each terminating in a seed at the central core of the fruit. The cells are an orange-yellow on the surface, becoming a very pale yellow inside when the pulp becomes softer. The seeds are covered by a sweetish orange skin, and are arranged regularly along the core, which is itself an extension of the stout, woody stalk.

The best parts to eat are the seeds and their sweetish skin. When the fruits are still unripe, sour, and hard, enormous quantities have to be gathered and carried to the camp where they are boiled until they are soft enough to open. The seeds are taken out and all the rest of the fruit is thrown away. When properly ripe, on the other hand, the seeds in their skins can be extracted on the spot, leaving the weight of the useless residue behind, lying in heaps under the tree. For eating, the skins are slit open with a *Cyrena* shell, the seeds [252] extracted, and the skins and seeds piled up separately on huge leaves. The leaves are then tied up with the usual cords of vegetable fibres, and the bags laid on hot ashes. The skins turn into a sticky paste, not bad tasting, and the roasted seeds are greatly improved to our taste, though still very indigestible.

[262] In April and May the Onges eat *bulundanghe* morning, noon and

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or form of numerical evaluation is further support for the extremely low stage of cultural development at which they became isolated.

22 ART

When painting their bodies with ochre the Onges have no idea of symbolic representation, and use only geometrical designs. These invariably seem spontaneous, and in my view do not represent a degenerate form of some more highly evolved art, half forgotten over the centuries; in short, the 'artists' of the Andamans, with no conception of symbolism, are even today less advanced than their Palaeolithic counterparts.

23 DIGGING STICKS

In late Palaeolithic deposits, stones with holes in them have been found which correspond to those still in use among peoples such as the Bushmen, to add weight to their digging sticks. The absence even today of any form of weighted stick in the Andamans, where stone is plentiful, would appear to antedate the culture at least to early Palaeolithic.

24 HUNTING

The Onges still use the Palaeolithic throwing stick, although it is not their main hunting weapon. They have no idea of fixed traps, which must from the evidence have been known in Palaeolithic times, and it is hard to believe that a people so dependent upon hunting would have lost the art once it had been acquired. They have crude nets which the women use for fishing, but these are probably a comparatively recent introduction, which has arrived via the Nicobars.

25 DOMESTIC ANIMALS

The Andamanese have none, and this would seem to add weight to the evidence for their great antiquity.

26 ECONOMY

There is no economic system of any kind, and from the evidence available it is highly unlikely that even the most primitive form ever existed. There is no conception whatever of providing for tomorrow, or of any form of exchange or barter.